



**SAINT LOUIS  
UNIVERSITY**

**PROGRESS REPORT ON ASSESSMENT  
FOR THE HIGHER LEARNING  
COMMISSION OF THE NORTH  
CENTRAL ASSOCIATION OF  
COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS**

**August 1, 2005**

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**Saint Louis University**  
**Progress Report on Assessment for the Higher Learning Commission**  
**August 1, 2005**

**Introduction**

The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Consultant-Evaluator Team completed a comprehensive site visit to Saint Louis University on April 15-18, 2002, and the findings from this comprehensive site visit were summarized in their exit report. The otherwise complimentary report accurately observed that “implementation of assessment is generally consistent at the unit level; however, not all of the elements for a comprehensive plan are in place.” The report further noted “quality-control is not evident across the University, improvement of programs based on feedback is not consistent, information is not aggregated institution wide, monitoring and reporting are not consistent, and assessment of the core curriculum has not developed.” The report specifically required institutional attention and Commission follow-up in the following two areas:

- 1) Integration of all assessment efforts and utilization of results, particularly at the University level, need to be moved forward significantly.
- 2) Maturation of the process of consistently and widely utilizing data from assessment programs to enhance student learning needs to occur.

This progress report documents the steps taken by Saint Louis University to meet the requirements laid out in the exit report and provides an accounting of additional steps taken to advance the institution’s determination to utilize evidence-based decision making for the purpose of enhancing student learning.

**Building a Culture of Evidence-Based Decision Making Throughout the University**

The exit report by the Consultant-Evaluator Team correctly observes that “in many places the campus is highly decentralized,” “a high level of functional decentralization is evident,” and “general education is decentralized.” This decentralized structure is certainly apparent when it comes to general education requirements, commonly referred to at Saint Louis University as the core course requirements. Apart from the philosophy and theology requirements, there is no common University-wide set of courses that is required of all undergraduate students. And, while common thematic patterns may be discerned among the University’s core curricula, the identification of specific courses that meet the core requirements is delegated to individual Colleges and Schools. While decentralization represents a conscious structural design of the University consistent with the principle of subsidiarity, this decentralization challenges the University to develop creative solutions that maximize the strengths of this structure while aligning academic units into collective action using appropriate assessment measures for the purpose of enhancing student learning.

Saint Louis University has responded to this challenge by developing a culture of evidence-based decision making across the University. This approach respects the autonomy of the diverse

academic units (consistent with the principle of subsidiarity), yet mandates that evidence regarding the success of curricular, instructional, and assessment programs in meeting University and academic program goals must drive the decision-making process. The ultimate goal of creating a culture of evidence-based decision making is improved institutional effectiveness and enhanced student learning (Bauer, 2003).

In turn, the development of a culture of evidence-based decision-making across the University requires (1) a fundamental understanding and articulation of outcomes assessment at the core-course, academic program, and University levels and (2) an ongoing series of professional development opportunities for faculty, department heads, and deans in the areas of effective instructional practices and outcomes alignment, articulation, and assessment. These represent the two prongs of the strategy employed by Saint Louis University not only to meet the requirements laid out for the University by the exit report but also to move the institution closer to the goal of a University-wide culture of evidence-based decision making.

### **First Steps**

Saint Louis University has taken seriously the Consultant-Evaluator Team's general assessment of the University, the advancement section of the exit report, and the areas cited above requiring institutional attention and Commission follow-up. The University assigned the Associate Provost for Planning and Decision Resources the task of coordinating all institutional assessment activities, creating a University-wide assessment committee, and charging the committee with the five-fold task of (1) sharing best practices and resources for outcomes and assessment methods, (2) promoting outcomes and assessment activities across the University, (3) identifying assessment experts among faculty and staff to work with departments and programs, (4) assessing faculty and department developmental needs in outcomes assessment and making recommendations for activities and delivery to meet needs, and (5) serving as an advisory group to the Office of Planning and Decision Resources in the design of institutional-level assessment. These actions are consistent with best practices (Walvoord, 2004) and signal Saint Louis University's commitment not only to meeting the requirements cited above but to moving the institution forward toward a culture of evidence-based decision making.

### **Refinement of University Outcomes**

University-level assessment presupposes a clear and widely understood articulation of University-level outcomes that serve as the starting point of the assessment process. At the time of the site visit of the Consultant-Evaluator Team, Saint Louis University had identified 23 separate outcomes for graduates of the University. Subsequent to the visit, in discussions among the Provost, deans, and Associate Provost, it became clear that these outcomes were not a viable framework for assessment at the University since they did not adequately reflect the unique mission of the University, did not take into account the differences in programs across the University (undergraduate, graduate, and professional), were written in the past tense as summative evaluations (e.g., "The graduate should have developed..."), and sometimes overlapped (e.g., "The graduate should have developed a persistent intellectual curiosity," and "The graduate should have developed a commitment to lifelong learning"). In addition, several outcomes were either not measurable or were difficult to assess (e.g., "The graduate should have developed respect for human life and the dignity of each person"). A compounding problem was that the outcomes were unwieldy in number. Consequently, individual programs tended to

assess only those of the 23 outcomes that were most closely related to their academic disciplines (e.g., “The graduate should have developed extensive knowledge in an area of study, competence for and in a profession, and preparation for advanced study”). A revised framework was needed if there were to be a comprehensive outcomes and assessment effort.

A key challenge in developing a workable student learning outcomes framework was to ensure that it reflected the unique mission of Saint Louis University (in Appendix A) or, more specifically, that it operationalized the mission in the form of relevant student outcomes. The framework also needed to be clear in its meaning and flexible enough to meet the needs of every academic program so that departments might develop appropriate and measurable outcomes within this framework. And, the framework, if it were to serve as the centerpiece of a comprehensive outcomes and assessment effort, would need horizontal coherence (across disciplines), vertical coherence (across organizational levels), and internal coherence (in that all elements of the framework would be assessed).

The University initiated a collegial process in fall 2002 to distill the essential elements of the 23 original outcomes. This process resulted in a framework for student learning outcomes and assessment entitled *The Five Dimensions of the Saint Louis University Experience* (Five Dimensions). These Five Dimensions are: scholarship and knowledge, intellectual inquiry and communication, community building, leadership and service, and spirituality and values (in Appendix B). The description of the process used to develop the Five Dimensions from the 23 outcomes, the benefits of creating the dimensions, and the process that was used to elicit feedback from University stakeholders is described in Appendix C, which was presented as a paper at the annual meeting of the North Central Association in April 2005. The Five Dimensions are designed to avoid the flaws of the 23 outcomes cited above; to meet the needs of the University by having horizontal, vertical, and internal coherence; and to be the centerpiece of a comprehensive outcomes and assessment effort that operationalizes the University’s mission.

### **Outcomes Articulation and Alignment with the Five Dimensions**

The Five Dimensions, because they emanate from the mission of Saint Louis University, provide normative criteria for assessing institutional effectiveness and the framework for the integration of all other University outcomes and assessment practices occurring at the University, program, and core course levels. This effort of outcomes articulation and alignment of core courses around the Five Dimensions within a decentralized University structure was accomplished through a series of initiatives at the department and at the core course levels.

#### **A) Program of Study Outcomes Alignment**

Meetings were held starting in the fall of 2002 involving deans, assessment coordinators, and department chairs to establish a process to articulate the outcomes for each program of study around the Five Dimensions and to provide information on how these outcomes were assessed. All of the departments (undergraduate, graduate, and professional) performed the task of articulating outcomes and assessment activities for each of their programs of study. The outcomes and assessment activities were configured into grids organized by department and by School/College.

## **B) Core Course Outcomes Alignment for the Undergraduate Experience**

In addition to the work at the program level, faculty teaching in undergraduate programs of study articulated the outcomes expected in the core courses that students are required to take. The articulation of these outcomes was transmitted to the departments that provide the core courses. In the spring of 2003, conversations between those departments that provide core courses and those programs that require the core courses began in earnest.

The process of articulation of core course outcomes by degree program, the articulation of core course outcomes from course providers, and the alignment of core course outcomes with the outcomes of degree programs and the Five Dimensions continued into the fall of 2003. The memoranda indicate that greater clarity and alignment were achieved with each iteration of the outcomes and assessment articulation. The purpose of this iterative process was to ensure alignment of core course outcomes with outcomes for programs that required these courses. This proved to be an important step in aligning core courses with program outcomes and in creating a feedback loop necessary to carry out an effective system of outcomes assessment.

## **C) Across Department Feedback Loop**

The articulation and alignment activities cited above not only align core course outcomes with degree program requirements and University outcomes (the Five Dimensions) but also provide an assessment framework for ongoing communication between core course providers and departments and degree programs that require these core courses. This communication, because it is not a static activity, provides for an ongoing, continuous feedback loop for the purpose of program improvement and institutional change as departments undergo their routine program reviews (Walvoord, 2005). The use of this information and other evidence will become more commonplace as knowledge regarding the effective use of assessment to enhance student learning becomes more deeply infused into the University ethos.

## **D) Evaluation of Outcomes and Assessment Activities**

The documents submitted by departments regarding outcomes and assessment activities for their degree programs and the documents submitted by departments regarding outcomes and assessment of required core courses that they provide were reviewed by the Associate Provost according to the criteria listed below. This was done to ensure that the outcomes and assessment activities moved the University forward in building a culture of evidence-based decision making.

### Evaluation Criteria for Outcomes

Do they address the Five Dimensions?

Are they manageable?

Are they meaningful?

Are they measurable?

### Evaluation Criteria for Assessment Activities

Are they appropriate for the specified outcomes?

Do they measure the specified outcomes?

Do they occur regularly?

Are they summative for the program?

Do they provide information for program improvement?

The Associate Provost, the faculty intern for assessment (described in the Faculty Development section below), and the associate deans provided additional support to departments, particularly in the College of Arts and Sciences, that needed guidance in the articulation of measurable outcomes and worked to standardize and operationalize the information submitted to ensure the utility and alignment of the assessment practices with outcomes.

In the framework of the Five Dimensions, faculty in every program of study in the University have now identified outcomes, articulated how core course outcomes align with the outcomes of a given program of study, and articulated how the outcomes are assessed. The entire process has ensured alignment of core course outcomes and assessment with program outcomes and the University's Five Dimensions. It also has enhanced many faculty members' participation in the culture of evidence-based decision making for improved institutional effectiveness and enhanced student learning.

### **Additional Assessment of the Core Courses**

Additional assessment data on the core experience has been obtained through the Survey of Students' Perceptions of the Core Experience. The survey is a cooperative effort between the Office of Planning and Decision Resources and the College of Arts and Sciences' Core Assessment Committee. Administered to undergraduate students in the spring of their fourth year at Saint Louis University, the survey asks a series of questions that measure the students' perceptions of their core curriculum experience in preparing them to perform functions aligned with the Five Dimensions. In addition to the specific four-point Likert-style questions, the survey includes open-response prompts designed to elicit more holistic assessments of the core and how it might be improved. The survey is structured so that the assessment data can be disaggregated by College or School. The results provide deans and faculty with assessment data regarding students' perceptions of the core experience that can be used to initiate changes.

### **Developing a Culture of Evidence-Based Decision-Making**

The beginnings of a culture of evidence-based decision making can be found in the annual assessment reports submitted by the deans of the respective Schools/Colleges. The deans are asked to note the changes that have been or will be made as a result of assessment findings and the rationale for those changes. The deans' reports are summarized by the Associate Provost in a report to the Provost that is distributed to all Schools and Colleges (see Appendix D for the 2005 summary report). The assessment results will continue to inform practice continuously and will undoubtedly lead to more changes that enhance student learning.

### **Institutional Assessment**

At the institutional level, the Office of Planning and Decision Resources (OPDR) conducts ongoing research, shaped by the framework of the Five Dimensions, to answer questions and address challenges the University faces in enhancing student learning. For example, OPDR has undertaken a series of studies, utilizing surveys and focus groups, to examine student perceptions and development during each year of the undergraduate experience. The resulting reports are shared in written form with faculty, staff, and administrators and through presentations to various committees. In addition, the results have informed a series of Undergraduate Summits sponsored by the Office of the Provost for faculty, staff, and students. The purpose of the Summits is to involve the University community in generating ideas to improve the undergraduate experience.

Based on the findings from the OPDR studies and the discussions at the Summits, the University has made significant changes to enhance opportunities for undergraduate students to integrate more fully into the University community.

### **Faculty Development**

The process employed to articulate outcomes and to build a culture of evidence-based decision making throughout the University has involved the creation and wide dissemination of a framework (The Five Dimensions) and the initiation of outcomes articulation at the program and core course levels that is aligned with the framework. The process has utilized the existing decentralized structure to achieve a coherent outcomes assessment process. Faculty have been deeply engaged in the development of core course outcomes and the articulation of core course outcomes with program and University outcomes. This faculty engagement has accomplished the twin goals of integrating assessment efforts and utilization of results and laying the groundwork for continued maturation of the process of consistently and widely utilizing data from assessment activities to enhance student learning. The latter is, of course, an ongoing process that requires continued attention to faculty development.

Outcomes articulation and alignment are dynamic activities that are performed and completed as a component of an ongoing process of program and institutional improvement. The evidence gleaned from an evaluation of assessment data and utilized to make programmatic decisions drives this improvement. In order to build a culture of evidence-based decision making in which the use of assessment is ubiquitous implies that sufficient capacity has been built among individual faculty members and within departments, and this, in turn, implies a wide diffusion of knowledge and multiple opportunities for professional development in the areas of effective instructional practices and outcomes alignment, articulation, and assessment (Walvoord & Anderson, 1998).

A key component of this strategy of building leadership capacity among the faculty is coordinated through the University Assessment Committee. The University Assessment Committee was originally asked to design a University-wide assessment plan, monitor the implementation of the plan, review results, and make recommendations to administrators as appropriate. However, its mandate was expanded in the fall of 2004 to include the five-fold charge cited on page 2 of this progress report. The expanded role signaled that the committee was more than an advisory committee; it was to serve as a lever of change.

An added key component has been the introduction of a faculty internship experience under the direction of the Associate Provost. The faculty intern commits to serving ten hours per week for one semester with the Associate Provost in exchange for a reduced teaching load or a small stipend. The intern works with the Associate Provost on issues related to outcomes assessment and institutional effectiveness and, in the process, learns a great deal about how evidence-based decision making can lead to enhanced student learning. The internship experience augments the work of the University Assessment Committee in building leadership capacity among the faculty in the areas of outcomes assessment and institutional effectiveness.

Saint Louis University has also engaged in an ongoing series of professional development opportunities for faculty, department heads, and deans in the areas of effective instructional



practices and outcomes alignment, articulation, and assessment. Such a diffusion of knowledge nurtures the development of professional learning communities within all academic units and encourages individual faculty members to engage in action research regarding their own effectiveness in helping students reach course and program outcomes. A key target in building leadership capacity throughout the University is the department head (Wolverton, Gmelch, & Sorenson, 1998). Some of these professional development opportunities include programs for department chairs, with titles such as “Institutional, Program, and Course Assessment,” “Proving and Improving Through Assessment,” and “The Outcome of Outcomes.” Campus-wide professional development opportunities, with titles such as “Examining Our Assessment Practices from Policies to Classroom,” “Assessment Connections: From Minute Paper to Reaccreditation,” and “Teaching Creatively: Engaging Undergraduate Students at Saint Louis University” have drawn large numbers of faculty.

### **Conclusion**

Saint Louis University has addressed the concerns articulated in the Consultant-Evaluator Team’s exit report by developing a culture of evidence-based decision making across the University that includes (1) a fundamental understanding and articulation of outcomes assessment at the core course, academic program, and University levels and (2) an ongoing series of professional development opportunities for faculty, department heads, and deans in the areas of outcomes alignment, articulation, and assessment.

In response to the Consultant-Evaluator Team’s concern about assessment integration, the University has implemented the Five Dimensions of the Saint Louis University Experience and, using them as the University-wide framework, has systematically developed an integrated outcomes assessment mechanism to assess institutional effectiveness at the core course, academic program, and University levels. This effort has also enabled the University to disseminate assessment knowledge broadly and to create multiple opportunities for professional development in the areas of effective instructional practices and outcomes alignment, articulation, and assessment.

We believe that the work cited above has not only met the requirements identified in the Consultant-Evaluator Team’s exit report but has helped Saint Louis University begin to build a true culture of evidence-based decision making.

## References

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## Appendix A

### **Saint Louis University**

#### **Mission Statement**

The Mission of Saint Louis University is the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity. The University seeks excellence in the fulfillment of its corporate purposes of teaching, research and community service. It is dedicated to leadership in the continuing quest for understanding of God's creation, and for the discovery, dissemination and integration of the values, knowledge and skills required to transform society in the spirit of the Gospels. As a Catholic, Jesuit University, the pursuit is motivated by the inspiration and values of the Judaeo-Christian tradition and its guided by the spiritual and intellectual ideals of the Society of Jesus.

In support of this mission, the University:

- Encourages and supports innovative scholarship and effective teaching in all fields of the humanities, the natural, health and medical sciences, the social sciences, the law, business, aviation, and technology.
- Enables an academic environment which values and promotes free, active and original intellectual inquiry among its faculty and students.
- Maintains and encourages programs which link the University and its resources to its local, national, and international communities in support of efforts to alleviate ignorance, poverty, injustice, and hunger, to extend compassionate care to the ill and needy, and to maintain and improve the quality of life for all persons.
- Strives continuously to seek means to build upon its Catholic, Jesuit identity, and to promote activities which apply that intellectual and ethical heritage to work for the good of society as a whole.
- Welcomes students, faculty and staff from all racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds and beliefs and creates a sense of community which facilitates their development as men and women for others.
- Nurtures within its community an understanding of and commitment to the promotion of faith and justice in the spirit of the Gospels.
- Wisely allocates its resources to maintain efficiency and effectiveness in attaining its mission and goals.

## Appendix B

### **Five Dimensions of the Saint Louis University Experience**

Reflective of its mission, Saint Louis University strives to engage its students in five interrelated dimensions contributing to the development of the whole person: scholarship and knowledge, intellectual inquiry and communication, community building, leadership and service, and spirituality and values.

#### **Scholarship and Knowledge**

By developing a well-rounded educational foundation which incorporates learning through experience, by becoming scholars in their chosen fields, and by dedicating themselves to the advancement of knowledge, students are prepared for advanced study, for their careers, and for lifelong learning.

#### **Intellectual Inquiry and Communication**

By developing the abilities of intellectual inquiry and communication, students are able to learn effectively, express ideas and concepts clearly, and apply their knowledge to new situations they encounter.

#### **Community Building**

By welcoming and working with others, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or gender, students build an inclusive community which leads to respect and compassion for human life and the dignity of each person.

#### **Leadership and Service**

By serving others and by promoting social justice, students become men and women for others who lead by their example.

#### **Spirituality and Values**

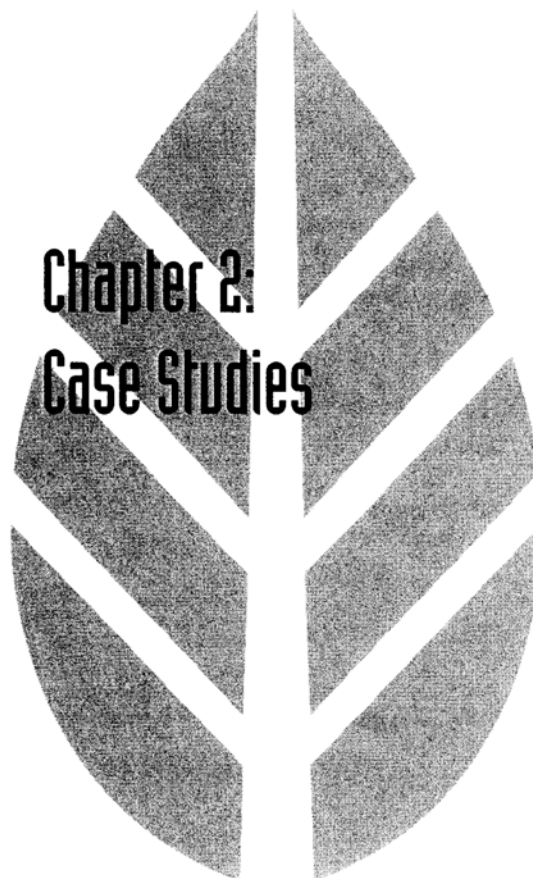
By developing their spirituality, values, and openness to the transcendent, students determine principles to guide their actions and their relationships with others.

Available electronically at [www.slu.edu/opdr](http://www.slu.edu/opdr);  
click on "SLU Assessment."

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**Volume 3: Becoming a Learning Focused Organization:  
Assessing and Improving Student Learning**



**Becoming a Learning-Focused Organization:  
Conversations and Commitments**

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# Building a Bridge from Mission to Student Outcomes

Julie Weissman and Kenneth J. Boning

## Introduction

Faculty resistance to assessment efforts at colleges and universities often hinders the effectiveness of these efforts (Muffo 1996; Palomba and Banta 1999; Schilling and Schilling 1998). This occurred at Saint Louis University (SLU), a private Midwestern university, when the deans developed a list of twenty-three student learning outcomes in 1998 and mandated that all programs assess these outcomes. This lengthy list of outcomes did not take into account the differences among the programs across campus, nor were the outcomes rooted in the mission of the institution. Some departments responded by adopting one or two of the outcomes and pointed to these when asked to provide evidence of assessment activities. However, this attempt at launching a comprehensive outcomes and assessment effort was largely ineffective.

To gain the interest, support, and commitment of institutional stakeholders in establishing student outcomes and assessing those outcomes, the university created the Five Dimensions of the Saint Louis University Experience. The five dimensions are derived from SLU's Jesuit, Catholic mission, thus representing a meaningful context for developing student outcomes. In effect, the dimensions serve as intermediary between the mission and student outcomes by operationalizing the mission. They express the institution's expectations for student engagement in the SLU community. The dimensions communicate the university's hopes for students to develop both professionally and personally in support of the mission.

The Five Dimensions recognize the diversity of programs and services in the university's twelve schools and colleges and student support areas. The new framework provides the flexibility for every academic program—undergraduate, graduate, and professional—and for student support areas to develop appropriate and measurable student outcomes within the context of the dimensions. In addition, the dimensions drive the assessment and evaluation activities in institutional research.

The purpose of this article is to describe the process the university undertook to develop the Five Dimensions of the Saint Louis University Experience and the benefits of creating this type of bridge connecting the university's mission and student outcomes.

## Background for the Development of a New Framework

Prior to 1998, assessment had been occurring in some of the programs but not in a coherent and meaningful way throughout SLU. In preparation for the self-study for reaccreditation, the deans agreed to a standard set of twenty-three student outcomes as part of an institution-wide assessment plan. Programs in all of the schools and colleges were directed to use the list of outcomes to define their assessment activities. Although a substantial amount of time and effort was devoted to this process, the plan proved to be ineffective for a number of reasons.

Overall, the number of outcomes was overwhelming. When faced with such a large number of outcomes to assess, faculty members in individual programs ended up selecting only a few on which to focus. The most often chosen were those immediately related to the academic discipline—for example, "The graduate should have developed (a) extensive knowledge in an area of study, (b) competence for and in a profession, and (c) preparation for advanced study."

The wording of the outcomes implied that students should be assessed only at graduation. Each outcome began with the phrase "The graduate should have developed." This overlooked the reality that knowledge, skills, and attitudes are continuously developed throughout a student's college years. In addition, at a doctoral-research university with a variety of programs, it is difficult if not impossible to create a list of student outcomes applicable to all of the undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs. For example, the outcome "The graduate should have developed an appreciation of the liberal arts and sciences" may not be suitable for graduate and professional programs.

The content of some of the outcomes was also problematic. Some outcomes represented similar ideas—for instance, "The graduate should have developed a persistent intellectual curiosity" and "The graduate should have developed a commitment to lifelong learning." Several were either not measurable or difficult to assess, such as "The graduate should have developed respect for human life and the dignity of each person." In addition, some of the outcomes were not realistic. For example, it is not reasonable to expect all graduates to develop "excellent oral communication skills." Furthermore, the role of the university in the development of some of the

outcomes was not clear. For instance, the outcome “The graduate should have developed personal integrity” implied that students lacked this quality before they entered SLU.

For the most part, faculty members chose to assess only a few outcomes or to ignore the new assessment plan altogether. Since faculty members were not involved in the development of the twenty-three outcomes, they had no ownership of the plan. The impediments to the assessment plan, including the lack of faculty buy-in, the overwhelming number of outcomes to assess, and the challenges with the outcomes themselves hindered the establishment of a comprehensive framework for assessment. The lack of commitment to the 1998 assessment structure was noted by the visiting team for Higher Learning Commission accreditation in April 2002. The team pointed out that not all elements were in place for a comprehensive university-wide assessment plan.

## Developing the Framework

The visiting team’s recommendations and the formation of a new office charged with coordinating and supporting assessment efforts across the university were the impetus for revisiting the assessment plan. Discussions occurred in early September 2002 with the provost and deans regarding the need for an effective outcomes and assessment structure. This dialogue helped to lay the foundation for the development process. The goal of the process was to design a framework that was related to the mission; encompassed the diversity of the undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs at SLU; and provided a context for the programs to develop relevant and measurable student outcomes.

Several resources were consulted during the process of creating the new framework. A review of student outcomes information in the literature and on Web sites of numerous institutions stressed that institutional-level student outcomes should originate in the mission of an institution and should number fewer than ten (American Association for Higher Education 1992; López 2000; Palomba and Banta 1999; San Francisco State University 1997). The format for institutional outcomes at a number of institutions included broad general statements, or core values, with descriptions or outcomes listed under each (Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis 1998). Sources also emphasized that the specific outcomes should be created by individual programs and faculty members (Higher Learning Commission 2002; Palomba and Banta 1999), since outcomes mandated from outside the program might meet with resistance (Willamette University 1996).

Previous efforts were not disregarded in designing the framework. In fact, the list of twenty-three outcomes served as a starting point. Major concepts inherent in the university’s mission statement were identified, and a framework of five dimensions was drafted based on the existing list of outcomes and the examination of the mission, the literature, and other institutions’ outcomes. Using factor analysis, the five dimensions were tested against responses to the university’s 2002 alumni survey, in which respondents rated the university’s effectiveness in helping them develop or reaffirm the twenty-three student outcomes. Patterns in the responses supported the groupings of the outcomes within the dimensions.

The next step was to solicit feedback from the university community on the proposed framework. Discussions were held with campus leaders, including the provost, associate and assistant provosts, and the deans, and with several groups across the campus in which faculty and staff from student support areas are members—for example, the university assessment committee, the retention management committee, and the academic resources council. The reaction to the initial draft was positive. The connection between the five dimensions and SLU’s mission was readily apparent. In addition, faculty and staff members were receptive to the idea of a framework that recognized the diversity of the university’s programs and services and offered the flexibility of developing outcomes appropriate for their programs and services within the context of the five dimensions.

The input from the discussions was used to make changes to the original draft. The framework was then shared again with a number of groups across campus in order to ensure that the five dimensions incorporated all aspects of the SLU experience. After additional revisions following these meetings, the framework was approved by the provost and deans in February 2003.

## Five Dimensions of the Saint Louis University Experience

The new framework, named the Five Dimensions of the Saint Louis University Experience, is shown in the box. The dimensions include wording from the mission statement and differentiate the university from other colleges and universities by defining what makes the SLU experience distinct. The first two dimensions, scholarship and knowledge and intellectual inquiry and communication, are common to almost all colleges and universities. Community building is usually stressed at institutions involved in the community and committed to diversity. The dimensions of leadership and service and spirituality and values define the Jesuit, Catholic mission of SLU.

The Five Dimensions of the Saint Louis University Experience resolved the problems of the previous list of outcomes. First, the new framework is clearly mission-based and indicates the values of the SLU experience. It is limited in number to five dimensions, thus creating a manageable list with which to work. It provides a context for the programs and services to develop measurable student outcomes and is broad enough to encompass the diversity of SLU programs and services. It is flexible enough that programs could fit

their existing outcomes to the dimensions as well as develop new outcomes as appropriate. There is no arbitrary limit to the number of student outcomes that can be developed, nor are any outcomes mandated. Finally, the framework implies that engaging students in the dimensions takes place throughout a student's college years and can be assessed accordingly, rather than only at the time of graduation.

### Five Dimensions of the Saint Louis University Experience

Reflective of its mission, Saint Louis University strives to engage its students in five interrelated dimensions contributing to the development of the whole person: scholarship and knowledge, intellectual inquiry and communication, community building, leadership and service, and spirituality and values.

- **Scholarship and Knowledge.** By developing a well-rounded educational foundation which incorporates learning through experience, by becoming scholars in their chosen fields, and by dedicating themselves to the advancement of knowledge, students are prepared for advanced study, for their careers, and for lifelong learning.
- **Intellectual Inquiry and Communication.** By developing the abilities of intellectual inquiry and communication, students are able to learn effectively, express ideas and concepts clearly, and apply their knowledge to new situations they encounter.
- **Community Building.** By welcoming and working with others, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or gender, students build an inclusive community which leads to respect and compassion for human life and the dignity of each person.
- **Leadership and Service.** By serving others and by promoting social justice, students become men and women for others who lead by their example.
- **Spirituality and Values.** By developing their spirituality, values, and openness to the transcendent, students determine principles to guide their actions and their relationships with others.

### Using the Five Dimensions

To help programs position their outcomes within the framework, the following list of sample indicators of engagement was developed for the five dimensions. The list incorporates many of the outcomes that were in the 1998 assessment plan.

Scholarship and Knowledge	Intellectual Inquiry and Communication	Community Building	Leadership and Service	Spirituality and Values
Being prepared for advanced study Being prepared professionally for work Demonstrating substantial knowledge and understanding of at least one field of study	Utilizing the tools and methods of research Understanding and applying technology and other resources Demonstrating the skills of communication, critical thinking (application, integration, analysis, synthesis, evaluation), problem-solving, and inquiry	Working collaboratively Demonstrating acceptance of and respect for others' differences Advocating diversity	Devoting time and effort to help others in need Serving as an example for others to follow Demonstrating an understanding of the interconnectedness of global and local concerns	Defining and articulating one's own values and beliefs Practicing self-reflection for others to follow Making informed and ethical decisions in personal and professional situations

Programs were asked to align their existing outcomes and assessment activities within the dimensions, which they were able to do easily, even if they had been using the outcomes from the previous plan. Most programs had existing outcomes in each of the dimensions, and those that did not were asked to create outcomes for the dimensions that were not represented. Since the adoption of the Five Dimensions, all of the university's programs have identified outcomes and implemented assessment activities using the new framework.



## Benefits of the Five Dimensions

Building a bridge between the institution's mission and student outcomes has resulted in benefits for the SLU community. Faculty members are more likely to support and participate in student outcomes and assessment efforts when they have a relevant and meaningful framework to utilize. Limiting the framework to five dimensions makes the development of program-level outcomes manageable. Furthermore, translating the mission statement into a framework for student outcomes has provided a meaningful context for assessment activities.

As the student support areas have become involved in developing student outcomes and assessing those outcomes, they have found that doing so within the context of the Five Dimensions has facilitated these processes. The framework gives them a context for reflecting on their roles in student engagement and their expectations for students.

The framework of the Five Dimensions has shaped the university's institutional research agenda as well. Research studies focus on the question of SLU's effectiveness in engaging students in the dimensions. Alumni and graduating student surveys that are created internally were redesigned to reflect the dimensions. Results from surveys created externally, such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (2003), are analyzed in the context of the dimensions. The dimensions also serve as a foundation for examining the effectiveness of SLU's first-year experience programs and for structuring studies of the undergraduate experience.

Most importantly, having a common framework for student outcomes across the university allows the institution to gain a global perspective on its effectiveness in fulfilling its mission. The Five Dimensions of the Saint Louis University Experience clearly articulate the institution's expectations for student engagement in the university community and facilitate the measurement of those expectations.

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## Appendix D

### **Saint Louis University Deans' Annual Assessment Reports**

#### **Highlights of Changes July 1, 2005**

Highlights of changes made in SLU's programs are categorized under the Five Dimensions of the SLU Experience. Because the five dimensions are derived from the University mission, this summary allows the institution to gain a global perspective on its improved effectiveness in fulfilling its mission.

#### **Scholarship and Knowledge**

*By developing a well-rounded educational foundation which incorporates learning through experience, by becoming scholars in their chosen fields, and by dedicating themselves to the advancement of knowledge, students are prepared for advanced study, for their careers, and for lifelong learning.*

#### College of Arts and Sciences

Undergraduate capstone courses have been added in Computer Science, Sociology, and Criminal Justice.

#### Doisy College of Health Sciences, Physical Therapy

As a result of on-going analyses of the trends in physical therapy practice and education and of the performance standards, a number of programmatic changes are planned. These include the development of a five-year plan to implement courses for the new entry-level Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) degree and phase out of those courses related to the entry-level Master of Physical Therapy.

#### Parks College, Aviation Science

Assessment results demonstrated that the Professional Pilot program needed better alignment with the mission of the University. Faculty (both within as well as outside the department), staff, students, alumni, industry representatives, and emeritus faculty engaged in a retreat to discuss the meaning of Jesuit education, the meaning of an academic discipline, and the alignment of the program with SLU's mission. As a result of over nine months of discussions and deliberations, a new curriculum evolved. The new degree program is called the B.S. in Aeronautics with a concentration in Flight Science and will be offered in fall 2005. A learner-centric pedagogy is an integral part of this new curriculum.

#### College of Public Service, School for Professional Studies, Organizational Studies

Student portfolios are the primary mechanism used for assessing program-specific outcomes in SPS. From a review of the portfolios, faculty instituted several changes in the courses. For example, the survey course, OSTD 300, and the capstone course, OSTD 480, were revised to include a component on the purpose and application of an organizational studies degree while

PSYK 205, Research Methods and Statistics, was revised to strengthen instruction on accessing scholarly literature using databases.

#### Cook School of Business, Undergraduate Program

An experimental course, Freshmen in Business, will be launched in fall 2006 in response to issues about undergraduate student engagement which surfaced in the EBI, NSSE, and focus groups.

#### Cook School of Business, MBA

During the course of the last two years, the Cook School has been involved in major overhauls of its MBA programs, implementing a new professional MBA program in fall 2004 and continuing to develop a new full-time MBA program for implementation in summer 2006. These revisions were initiated and have been driven by information from a number of sources including student focus groups and individual interviews, discussions with business managers who serve on the Dean's Executive Board and department advisory boards, information from internship site supervisors, feedback from outside judges on live cases presented by MBA student teams, and enrollment and placement data.

#### School of Medicine, Doctor of Medicine Program

Three new capstone elective courses in year four of the degree program were designed and implemented in AY04. Fifty-six students participated in these electives, and the courses received very strong student ratings.

#### School of Medicine, Anatomy Programs

A new two-semester Basic Anatomical Sciences Techniques course to train students early in their first year of the graduate program was developed. The course focuses on the fundamental principles and methodologies for microscopically studying biological cells, tissues, and organ systems. Students were not receiving uniform training in anatomical methodology and techniques in the different Principal Investigator/Mentor laboratories. Thus, the start of research projects was delayed by the students' requirement to master some fundamental anatomical techniques. By completing the Basic Anatomical Sciences Techniques course in the first semester of their first year of graduate training, students will be better prepared for starting their thesis research projects and for postgraduate work requirements.

#### School of Public Health

A new Master of Science degree in Biosecurity will be implemented in fall 2005. In addition, the faculty of the School of Public Health will offer jointly with the faculty of the School of Medicine a new concentration in the Ph.D. program, Health Services Research/Outcomes Research.

#### School of Social Service, Bachelor of Science in Social Work

The number of elective credit hours in the BSSW program was increased from 15 to 21 hours. Through the BSSW program evaluation, students indicated they would like to have more electives in order to earn a minor, a second major, or a certificate and still be able to graduate at around 120 credit hours. These minors or majors (e.g., Spanish, Business) would compliment their social work education and make graduates more marketable for employment or graduate

schools. In addition, the number of credit hours of social work courses increased from 39 to 42 credit hours. The content of the social work practice courses was restructured and a fourth practice course was added to the social work curriculum. Through the BSSW program evaluation, students indicated they would like more content on macro practice (e.g., legislative advocacy, community development administration) without a corresponding reduction in micro practice content. An analysis of the social work course content conducted as part of the Professional Course Review found that micro practice was emphasized much more than macro content. A new practice course is now devoted solely to macro practice.

#### Center for Advanced Dental Education, Certificate in Orthodontics and Master of Science Degree

Core and specialty curricula have been updated in terms of content and to address perceived deficiencies documented in previous years by the American Board of Orthodontics Examination. Several new courses have been designed for the curriculum so that contemporary topics, such as implantology, are included.

#### **Intellectual Inquiry and Communication**

*By developing the abilities of intellectual inquiry and communication, students are able to learn effectively, express ideas and concepts clearly, and apply their knowledge to new situations they encounter.*

#### College of Arts and Sciences, Core Courses

Several changes are planned for the core courses based on assessment results. Some examples are the following.

##### *Biology*

- Instituted new pre- and post-lab assignments
- Working with the English department to develop curriculum to improve learning of scientific writing

##### *Communication*

- Will place more emphasis on audience analysis and context of public speaking situation
- Will build more culturally diverse case studies for courses

##### *English*

- Will introduce more classroom discussion of academic honesty

##### *Fine and Performing Arts*

- Will have students participate in more small group activities and make presentations

##### *History*

- Adopted new performance standards to bring more uniformity among sections

##### *Modern and Classical Languages*

- Introduced field trips to Russian-speaking community as a component of the course requirements
- Offered students the option of reinforcing grammar acquisition in Spanish either through WebCT or by using a workbook
- Will increase discussion in Spanish of value systems based on cultural materials such as videos and music

### Parks College, Physics

One of the learning outcomes of the Physics program is proficiency using computers to solve physical problems. Assessment of student research projects indicated that while the students were skilled at using scientific software packages, they had not mastered a computer language and scientific programming. The Department of Physics discussed this problem with the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science, resulting in a new course requirement for physics students, CSCI 145, Scientific Programming.

### School of Medicine, Doctor of Medicine

The Community and Behavioral Sciences block of the Patient, Physician, and Society I course, which had a history of low student ratings, was replaced by a new block, Applied Clinical Skills. This new block included visits to community preceptors and a new small group, case-based teaching approach with actors playing the roles of patients. The block was very well received by the medical students, and the course tied for the highest ratings in the first-year curriculum.

### School of Social Service, Bachelor of Science in Social Work

The BSSW program reduced the number of general education requirements from 66 credit hours to 57 credit hours and added one new required course. This was done for two reasons: (1) to ensure the best possible combination of courses to provide students with a solid liberal arts background and (2) to prepare them for the social work major and social work practice. For example, CMMA 120, Public Speaking, replaced ENGA 400, Business and Professional Writing. Through the BSSW program evaluation, students indicated that some of content of ENGA 400 was reflected in other courses, and they could benefit more from a public speaking course. Taking CMMA 120, as well as incorporating more oral presentations into social work courses, will assist students in improving their public speaking skills.

### **Community Building**

*By welcoming and working with others, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or gender, students build an inclusive community which leads to respect and compassion for human life and the dignity of each person.*

### College of Arts and Sciences, International Studies

A new one-hour credit course has been added to prepare students for their experiences abroad. A post-study abroad course is being developed.

### Doisy College of Health Sciences

A new course was implemented during fall 2004, MPT 101, Student Development I, for Physical Therapy majors. The course incorporates the concepts integral to U 101 as well as an introduction to the major. The overall goal of the course is to help students be successful at SLU and to understand the Physical Therapy program. A similar course for Occupational Therapy majors is planned for this fall. In addition, the Occupational Therapy department will implement a sophomore level course, OCSH 200, Concepts in O.S. and O.T, to facilitate retention and to increase the acculturation of students progressing toward the professional MOT degree.

### School of Social Service

The School of Social Service, along with faculty from 11 other majors, is developing a new course, entitled Orientation to the Helping Professions. Faculty and student support staff identified the need for a course that would review helping professions, such as social work, education, and the health professions. Social work will host the two-credit course for the first time in spring 2006.

### **Leadership and Service**

*By serving others and by promoting social justice, students become men and women for others who lead by their example.*

### School of Social Service, Bachelor of Science in Social Work

The BSSW program evaluation and the Professional Course Review identified that the social work curriculum did not emphasize social justice enough. It should, however, given its importance to the social work profession, to the School of Social Service as exemplified by the School having a Center for Social Justice Education and Research, and to the Jesuit mission. The BSSW Program Committee during spring 2005 reviewed each social work course and infused social justice content into the description or objectives of each social work course. In addition, the one-credit senior practicum seminar that students take in the spring semester has a social justice project as its main assignment.

### **Spirituality and Values**

*By developing their spirituality, values, and openness to the transcendent, students determine principles to guide their actions and their relationships with others.*

### College of Arts and Sciences, Communication

The faculty will offer a course in Communication Ethics beginning in spring 2006. In addition, the Public Speaking Taskforce is developing a unit on ethics to be incorporated into CMMA 120, Public Speaking.

### Graduate School

Since 1993, all graduate students upon completion of their degree complete an Exit Survey regarding departmental requirements and expectations, advising, academic quality, mentoring, ethics, and Graduate School services. Since its inception, 4,700 graduates have completed the survey. The average score for all questions on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) is over 4.0, and these scores by year are remarkably consistent. The highest ranked item (4.43) expresses an overwhelmingly positive perception by the doctoral students with the quality of their research education. Similarly, the mean response to the question regarding the ethics and values dimension was 4.30. These data not only confirm our graduates' perception of high academic quality but also a graduate education consistent with the Catholic, Jesuit ideals of Saint Louis University.

## **Other Indicators of Effectiveness**

### College of Arts and Sciences, Theological Studies

The department developed and was awarded a multi-year grant from Wabash College to involve all Theological Studies faculty, on a sequenced basis, in forming learning communities on assessment.

### Cook School of Business

Direct measures for program assessment have been embedded in five undergraduate courses and one graduate course with implementation of embedded measures in two more undergraduate courses planned for fall 2005.

### Doisy College of Health Sciences

During AY05, the former Schools of Allied Health Professions and Nursing were integrated to produce the new Doisy College of Health Sciences. An ad hoc faculty committee was charged with reviewing the current structures and functions of both Schools and making recommendations for the future entity. Among the questions the committee addressed was: What could be shared outcome competencies of all students? The work of the faculty resulted in a proposal of a list of core competencies and shared values for the College.

### Graduate School

A survey is sent each spring to the University's graduate assistants. The purpose of the survey is to confirm that their assignments are consistent with policies and expectations and to investigate their satisfaction with the learning experience of their assistantships. On the basis of a Likert-type scale, the responses are uniformly positive. All data are distributed to departments after analysis to affect positive program change.